

Rhode Island College

Master of Arts in English
Student Handbook

Revised January 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Rhode Island College English Department prepares graduate students to read, write, and think critically about literature and culture at an advanced level. Concentrators in creative writing expand their knowledge of and proficiency in the crafts of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. Our graduates are prepared to function as literary professionals, whether as teachers, writers, or scholars. A graduate degree in English can open doors for career paths in publishing, editing, administration, or marketing in a variety of corporate, online, and academic settings.

2. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

M.A. in English, Literature

THIRTY CREDIT HOURS of literature courses at the graduate (400-500) level.*

(A maximum of two courses at the 400-level may be counted in the program.)

Required Course:

ENGL 501: Literary and Cultural Theory

Introduces students to current critical theories and methodologies in the study of literature, writing and culture.

THESIS (ENGL 591 & 592) or COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

*500-level courses are 3 credits each.

M.A. in English, Concentration in Creative Writing

THIRTY CREDIT HOURS of courses at the graduate level.

(At least twelve of those hours must be in graduate-level literature or theory courses.)

Required courses:

ENGL 501: Literary and Cultural Theory

Introduces students to current critical theories and methodologies in the study of literature, writing and culture.

ENGL 581: Workshop in Creative Writing (taken for three semesters)

THESIS (ENGL 591 & ENGL 592)

Non-matriculating students in English graduate courses (those who have not yet been admitted to a degree or certificate program) must maintain good standing to continue enrollment, whether or not they intend to apply credits toward a degree or certificate.

Good standing in an English graduate program means a minimum GPA of 3.00 or above and no more than two outstanding completes. Students with outstanding Incomplete grades in more than two English courses are required to consult with the program director for approval to enroll in additional classes. Students should consult the RIC Graduate Studies Policies and Procedures Manual for additional retention and grade requirements.

<https://www.ric.edu/documents/graduate-studies-manual>

Thesis Plan

Under the thesis plan (optional for M.A. in English; required for M.A. in English, Concentration in Creative Writing), students take ENGL 591: Directed Reading, in preparation for the writing of the thesis, followed by the ENGL 592: Master's Thesis, in which the research and writing of the thesis are completed. Students register for these courses by filling out Independent Study forms and attaching proposals. The 592 proposal must be approved by the Departmental Graduate Committee or, in the case of a creative writing thesis, the Creative Writing Advisory Committee. Both 591 and 592 are three credits each and count towards the program's 30-hour requirement.

The thesis will be written under the direction of an appropriate faculty advisor and will be read by a committee that includes the advisor, an English department faculty member, and an outside reader. The thesis will normally be a substantial critical / research paper of approximately 50–70 pages in length. For Creative Writing Concentration students, the thesis will consist of a substantial body of either fiction or nonfictional prose of approximately 60-80 pages, or 30-35 pages of poetry. A defense of the thesis before a faculty committee, including one outside reader, is required in all cases.

Examination Plan

Under the examination plan and upon completion of at least 24 credit hours of graduate course work, the student writes a 48-hour take-home essay examination. The exam is based on reading lists in two of the following categories: (1) British Literature before 1800, (2) British Literature since 1800, (3) American Literature, and (4) theory or genre. Each reading list should consist of a minimum of ten texts. With the exception of the theory category, the list should include at least six primary texts and a minimum of four secondary, critical works. The departmental graduate advisor must approve the reading lists and, in consultation with the student, will appoint faculty advisors in the two chosen areas to conduct the exam.

3. DEADLINES

THESIS PROPOSALS (for 591 & 592):

Fall: December 1

Spring: April 15

COMPLETED THESIS:

Fall: November 15 (defense by early December)*

Spring: April 15 (defense by early May)*

*Students must submit the thesis ten working days before the scheduled defense date.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS:

Fall: Administered no later than the first week of December

Spring: Administered no later than the first week of May

Additional graduate policies and procedures can be found in the RIC Graduate Studies Policies and Procedures Manual. This is also where students and faculty advisors can find thesis guidelines; forms and templates for a Directed Study application, a thesis proposal approval, and an oral defense scheduling request, as well as a sample thesis title page.

<https://www.ric.edu/departments-directory/office-graduate-studies/graduate-manual-forms>

4. THESIS PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

For English 591: Directed Reading (Literature)

In consultation with their advisor, the student should prepare a 2-3 page proposal for a one semester, three-credit independent study leading to the writing of the thesis. The proposal should contain the following:

- 1) A brief summary of the topic and general area of study in which the student intends to carry out research. The summary should refer to books in the bibliography (see #5) and describe the intellectual and critical context for the project.
- 2) A list of questions or statements about specific issues related to the topic that the student wishes to explore and research.
- 3) A statement about the theories, methods, and approaches the student expects to use.
- 4) An approximate timetable for the work to be accomplished in the first semester, including plans to meet with the advisor (one-hour weekly meeting minimum).
- 5) A bibliography (at *least* eight to ten works that relate to the area).

For English 592: Master's Thesis (Literature)

In consultation with their advisor, the student should prepare a 4-6 page proposal along with a thorough bibliography. The proposal for 592 should be more specific and detailed than that for 591. It should include the following:

- 1) A clear description of the topic, main texts, and central argument (thesis) of the project. The description should explain how the argument fits into the intellectual context of the field and relates to previously established critical arguments relevant to the topic.
- 2) An explanation of the theoretical approach, terms, and methods to be used in the thesis.
- 3) Reference to specific texts in the bibliography and a brief discussion of how they will be used.
- 4) An approximate timetable for the writing of the thesis during the semester, including plans to meet with the advisor (one-hour weekly meeting minimum).
- 5) A complete bibliography.

The proposal for 592 will be read and evaluated by the members of the Graduate Committee. The writing should be intelligible to readers who are not experts in the field.

For English 591: Directed Reading (Creative Writing)

In consultation with their advisor, students should prepare a 3-5 page proposal for a one semester, three-credit independent study leading to the writing of the thesis. The proposal should contain the following:

- 1) A brief summary of the topic and general area of study that will provide bedrock for the thesis. The summary should refer to books in the bibliography (see #5) and describe the intellectual and craft considerations relating to the thesis project.
- 2) A list of exploratory questions or statements about the craft elements, genres, and/or subjects that the student wishes to examine, in preparation for the final thesis.
- 3) A statement about the relation of the reading to the student's final thesis.
- 4) An approximate timetable for the work to be accomplished in the first semester, including plans to meet with the advisor (one-hour weekly meeting minimum).
- 5) A bibliography (at *least* eight to ten works that relate to the area).
- 6) A writing sample in the genre of the student's intended thesis (generally one work of prose or approximately six poems).

For English 592: Master's Thesis (Creative Writing)

In consultation with their advisor, students should prepare a 4-5 page proposal and accompanying writing sample. It should include the following:

- 1) A clear description of the focus, scope, and genre of the final thesis (e.g. short fiction, poetry, essays, novel excerpt).
- 2) An explanation of any craft or methodological frameworks shaping the final thesis.
- 3) An approximate timetable for the writing of the thesis during the semester, including plans to meet with the advisor (one-hour weekly meeting minimum).
- 4) A writing sample in the genre of the final thesis (generally one work of prose or six poems).

The proposal for 592 will be read and evaluated by the members of the Creative Writing Advisory Committee.

5. SAMPLE THESIS PROPOSALS

English 591: Directed Reading (Literature)

English 592: Master's Thesis (Literature)

English 591: Directed Reading (Creative Writing)

English 592: Master's Thesis (Creative Writing)

Ruba Bouzan

Professor Zubeda Jalalzai

ENGL 591: Directed Reading Proposal

30 June 2020

African Muslim Slaves: Their Arabic Narratives

The premise of my thesis will focus on various aspects of African Muslim slaves, their lives, and their Arabic education. The men I will be researching had more than one thing in common, but the most exciting element to me is their use and competency in the Arabic language and how it influenced the way they were seen by their masters and the people around them. I also share something in common with these men, and it is my own education in the Arabic language and Islamic religion. Though their education in the latter was more rigorous than my own, I intend to use my knowledge of both to better understand their writing and how it shaped their identities during the era of slavery. In fact, their proficiency in Arabic allowed one of the men, Abd al-Rahman Ibrahima, to be dubbed the “Arab Prince,” which he gladly accepted. This title introduces an interesting concept of the ever-changing identities these men went through in the span of their lives. They were Arabized and thus Arabized themselves for what I believe was a means of survival. For the most part, these men distinguished themselves from other slaves because of their literacy and education which may have been the reason for their seemingly different lives as enslaved people. I hope to pay special attention to how those pieces of their identities gave way to their new identities as slaves in America.

The first source that has helped narrow my focus down to this specific area is Edward Curtis’s *Muslims in America*. His first chapter explores the circumstances of African Muslim

slaves like Ayyuba Bin Suleiman or Job Ben Solomon, who along with the other men I will be researching were able to maintain their religion while still working for their masters. Curtis also mentions Abd al-Rahman Ibrahima whose story is unlike any slave known in literature. Abd al-Rahman was fortunate enough to have people such as President John Quincy Adams supporting his appeal for freedom and his return to Africa. He, however, would not leave until he bought the freedom of his wife and children. Amazingly, Abd al-Rahman garnered enough support and went on a nationwide tour to raise the funds required to purchase their freedom. Furthermore, Abd al-Rahman cleverly played the role of the “Arab Prince,” despite being African, that was placed upon him by the white people he was “entertaining.” He arguably used this to his advantage, as it was popularly thought that an educated slave’s identity was separate from his “Blackness.” I hope to use Edward Said’s *Orientalism* to guide me through how Orientalism played a role in omitting their Black identities and creating their new Arab identities.

Another source I will be looking at is Munawar Ali Karim’s *Liberty’s Jihad: African Muslim Slaves and the Meaning of America*. It explores, in depth, figures such as Ayyuba, Abd al-Rahman, and Bilali Mohammad. The book is divided into parts, the first seeks to discuss the origins of the slave trade in Africa and Islamic history. The second part gives specific passages and stories of three of the most well-known slaves in America. The last section discusses the legacy they left behind. I will also be working closely with Ala Alryyes’s *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar ibn Said* whose autobiography, written in Arabic, has caught my particular attention. Omar’s biography written in Arabic, as Alryyes writes, challenges a “literary template” (13) that slaves were expected not to stray from. This template that Omar and the other men deviated from, whether written or oral, sought to stick to the same facts of slavery which did not include an interest in the backgrounds of slaves and their personal life histories. The attention

that Omar, Ayyuba, and Bilali garnered for themselves came exclusively from their personal backgrounds and their lives before slavery. Learning about this template has helped me understand Alryyes's claim that African American literary scholars largely ignore the lives of literate Muslim slaves like Omar. My theory is that it is not purposefully done, rather that the "template" has been reinforced through generations of literature. Meaning, the focus of many literary scholars in this area is that of a slave who is not literate and was enslaved under harsher circumstances. With this in mind, I am going to look at Florence Marfo's *African Muslims in African American Literature* to further investigate the validity of the claim Alryyes makes about the scholarly potential literate slave narratives have. I also hope to find scholarly work on the impact these literate men may have had on African American literature as a whole.

Additionally, an interesting discussion in the introduction to *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar ibn Said* speaks to Omar's unwillingness to learn the English language and the veracity of whether or not he actually converted to Christianity. As I am fluent and proficient in the Arabic language, especially Quranic Arabic, I hope to look closely at Omar's writings for clues to substantiate those claims. Alryyes also includes essays in his research by contributing authors such as Sylviane Diouf and Allan Austin who take on some of the points he makes in his introduction and emphasize the importance of Omar's life and writings. Some of the questions I will ask regarding this topic include:

- Did the fact that these enslaved men came from educated backgrounds affect their lives in slavery?
- Were slave narratives written in Arabic protected from the influence of slave owners?

- Why is the field of African American literature, as Alryes believes, reluctant to acknowledge African Muslim slaves in America?
- What were the ulterior motives behind certain organizations working to send these slaves back to Africa?
- Why did the fact that they were literate affect whether or not they were viewed as Black?
- Is there any way to know how many educated slaves made their way to America?
- Was Omar's unwillingness to learn English an act of defiance against his masters?

Finally, Professor Jalalzai and I will meet for one hour per week to discuss the progress of my thesis research while also setting weekly deadlines for myself to finish readings and writing about what I have found during my research.

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Jessica Washak

Dr. Maureen Reddy

ENGL 592: Master's Thesis Proposal

4 December 2017

Fatally Female: A Study of the Treatment of Women in True Crime Narratives

As early as the mid-sixteenth century, narratives about criminal exploits were being distributed by pamphlet to those privileged enough to claim literacy. Perhaps something about the way such stories were written, and later acted out on the stage and in film, satisfied the human appreciation for the juxtaposition of good and evil, right and wrong. Over the centuries, literature recounting crimes has remained in circulation among a constantly growing readership. America, in particular, has proven its investment in crime narratives with the popularity of hard-boiled pulp fiction in the early twentieth century. These novels ushered in a new age of gritty storytelling. The fascination with murder, theft, and lawless behavior resulted in a penchant for book-length nonfiction as well. The true crime books have become a genre unto themselves, depicting every vice from money laundering to abduction, organized crime life to missing persons cases. Among the most popular are those about violent crime. The portrayal of suffering within these narratives is often dependent on specific archetypes which solicit attention and reflection. My master's thesis encompasses a survey of literature on four high-profile cases—the unsolved murder of Elizabeth Short in Los Angeles in 1947, the trial of O.J. Simpson for the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman, the mass shooting carried out by teenagers Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris at their high school, and the case against Amanda Knox for the murder of Meredith Kercher—and a philosophical and theoretical analysis of the way in which various authors recount them. I assert that, although each piece of literature demonstrates

a different level of awareness of this fact, it stands that the worst a woman can do—whether she is a criminal, a victim, or involved with either of those parties—is fail to exhibit under scrutiny the attributes her culture idealizes.

Female aesthetic is a common theme throughout my study. The first and most gruesome case researched was that of Elizabeth Short, who was slain in 1947. What makes Short stand out among a multitude of other female victims is her beauty at her time of death. Over the years, many books have been written about her case, which is still unsolved as of 2017. Though there are many nonfiction accountings, one of the most well known retellings of the crime is a fictionalized work by James Ellroy. The novel's popularity led to both a film and a graphic novel adaptation under the same name: *The Black Dahlia*. This was a moniker given to Short by friends, meant to signify her stylish femininity. Despite the gruesome nature of her murder—Short was cut into multiple pieces and dumped in a vacant lot—crime scene photos of the Black Dahlia have been disseminated through periodicals, visual art, and the like. Short achieved a level of fame that can best be explained by the theories of Laura Mulvey, who wrote in *Visual and Other Pleasures* about the psychoanalytic role of the male gaze in interrogating femininity and asserting masculine power.

Mulvey's writings can be applied to the O.J. Simpson trial as well, from which I focus primarily on head prosecutor Marcia Clark. In taking on the Simpson case, Clark came into the spotlight of an interested media, who were well familiar with Simpson's celebrity status. The long and melodramatic trial spawned dozens of books written by attorneys, journalists, and legal analysts. Of special interest are Christopher Darden's *In Contempt*; Marcia Clark's own take on the case, *Without a Doubt*; and Jeffrey Toobin's seminal *The Run of His Life*. All of these depict Clark besieged by the male gaze, operating within a judicial system that had traditionally

belonged to men. Where Clark is criticized reflects a gender specific set of expectations that, at times throughout the trial, go unsatisfied. Punishment for her uncertain position comes from a legion of sources.

The work of Judith Butler is helpful in understanding both why those around Marcia Clark bristled at her every move and also why Amanda Knox was treated so severely by the Italian justice system and the media. Gender, Butler states in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” is iterative. We perform it in accordance with our culture’s perception of what it is to be a man or a woman. Believing that it is inherent, however, proves a better deterrent against gender deviation, which would upset patriarchal power structures. In order to preserve the desired hierarchies, individuals must be policed by those around them. Amanda Knox did not fit into the Italian standard of womanhood and thus gave the appearance of being unnatural or odd. This combined with her close proximity to Meredith Kercher persuaded police that she had most likely been responsible for the murder and that Knox needed to be locked away in prison. Though initially convicted, Knox has since been absolved of the crime and published a book about her ordeal, *Waiting to be Heard*. This memoir is no doubt in response to several other publications on her case, like Candace Dempsey’s *Murder in Italy* and Barbie Latza Nadeau’s inflammatory *Angel Face*.

Kathy Harris and Sue Klebold occupy a shared role distinct from those of Clark, Knox, and Short. Neither of them committed a crime or had a crime committed against them. They were, however, taken to civil court to face a \$2.53 million lawsuit alleging their parental negligence made them culpable for the actions of their sons, the Columbine High School shooters Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. The writings of Cynthia Comacchio explain the role of the industrialized science of the early twentieth century in spreading the idea that the actions and

characteristics of the mother are tied to the development of her child. The onus for any wrongdoing is instantly associated with the negligence of the mother, the implication being that her effort and attention should be funneled into her child rather than anything else. Womanhood, as it has often been before, is thus synonymous with motherhood. In this scenario, still relevant in the twenty-first century, the father figures are not included in any of the considerations. As all of these cases show, masculinity must not be interrupted.

This study's concerns are not limited to those with an interest in crime. Popular literature on crimes committed in the past century produces a number of artifacts through which to better examine patterns of violence toward both men and women, the methods of policing that we have adapted at the legislative, judicial, and wider societal levels, and the ways in which women in the real world are portrayed by third parties who bring a preconceived notion about the narrative of the crime they wish to write about before they ever begin interviewing and researching. What does the latter suggest about the cultural need to situate women in very particular roles not only in the realm of fiction, but also in reality? How are women who stray from their society's gender ideologies treated by the men who reserve the right to gaze at them and subsequently take responsive action if necessary? Further, how do we begin to account for the fact that the most intricate of violent crimes are quickly commodified by the writers who attempt to publish versions of such events? These questions have a much broader application than they may initially appear to; they reveal the impacts of class, gender, and racial intersectionality on lives and carry serious implications regarding the way that human beings make sense of each other, the question of identity, and the role that cultural socialization plays in dictating how we act. At this time, literary scholars have not established any tradition of examining true crime narratives. Instead published accounts framed in ways similar to those in my study have been researched

and interpreted primarily by legal journals and occasionally by those trained in the field of sociology or psychology. Despite this lack of precedence, many of the theories and criticisms employed in the realm of literary study have the ability to inform and highlight criminal nonfiction in new and relevant ways.

Based on the research completed during my Directed Reading (ENGL 591) period in the Fall 2017 semester, I have already begun to write the beginning of my thesis. In order to properly continue to draft my research into a final cohesive paper, I will organize my writing schedule around once per week meetings with my advisor, Dr. Reddy. In advance of our meetings, I will deliver approximately ten pages worth of material for Dr. Reddy's review. By following this model, a rough draft will be completed halfway through the Spring 2018 semester for further evaluation in advance of ultimately defending it before the Graduate Committee. Each of the weekly writings will account for a final grade at the end of the semester.

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Norman Suarez

Professor Boren

English 591

April 12th, 2019

Directed Reading Proposal

In the *Art of Fiction*, John Gardner defines psychic distance as “the distance the reader feels between himself and the events in the story.” Despite the term itself never quite catching on in academic circles, the idea of narrative distance as a recognizable degree of separation between the narrative and the narrator remains a valuable part of the writing process. Narrative distance goes hand in hand with point of view. The pairing functions similarly to that of a camera: the closeness of the shot reflects the distance and the different angles are like the perspectives of the story. It is through these pairings that numerous combinations of story are created: the first person narrative about events long past in the past tense; the third person novel told entirely through one person’s current thoughts and feelings; and everything in between. Narrative distance and point of view intersect and permeate through each facet of writing—plot, theme, setting, characters. The question then becomes how this connection affects writing, how the writer consciously or unconsciously shapes their story by the choices they make in distance and perspective.

The goal for my directed reading in the fall of 2019 is to focus on the relationship between narrative distance and point of view in fiction. How does one technique influence the other? How does it inform our readings of and connect characters and theme? It raises the question of who is speaking at a given moment: the narrator or the character? What is the

boundary line that separates one narrative from another? What is "truth?" I am fascinated to see how writers employ these tools in a variety of contexts to many great effects.

My exploration of narrative distance and point of view in fiction will exist in three stages. First, I will do a close reading of a vast array of fiction from different styles and forms to analyze the fundamental components of craft that come together to create a story. Next, using *Writing Fiction: a Guide to Narrative Craft*, *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, and *How Fiction Works* as frameworks, I will examine the roles narrative distance and point of view played in my reading materials, taking a greater focus on their relationship with characterization and theme. Finally, I will apply the accumulated knowledge over the course of the study to my own fiction to explore the manner in which I've utilized narrative distance and point of view as well as their specific influence in my fiction on a micro and macro scale. Will different patterns emerge with how characters develop or themes unfold based on the distance and perspective of the narrative? I look forward to exploring these possibilities.

To aid my study, I will be using a diverse arrangement of creative fiction. These stories will encompass both short fiction and novel length fiction with authors ranging from the mid-twentieth century to the writers of today. For the sake of organizing the work, I have divided the material into two broad categories: historical (i.e., more than 30 years old) and contemporary (i.e., less than 30 years old). The linear nature of the ordering will allow me to better observe the trends and changes in narrative distance and point of view.

The first works I wish to note are three short stories written by John Barth, Robert Olen Butler, and Robert Coover. Barth's short story, from which his collection derives its name, is "Lost in the Funhouse," a postmodern narrative that plays with time and perspective. I am interested to see how, through the meta-fictional lens, the identity of narrator is broken down and

the boundary line between protagonist, narrator, and author is removed. Butler's story is "Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot." There is much to be learned from how he handles the relationship between the main character's physical, emotional, and mental condition with the level of distance and perspective and how they play off one another. Coover's story is the provocatively titled "The Babysitter." The manner in which time and structure are manipulated causes the reader to question the truth and authenticity of the narrative given. How does Coover's use of distance in perspective shifts play a role in maintaining this effect? In my own fiction, how does my closeness impact the apparent validity of the narration?

Two classic novels of great significance to my study are William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Faulkner's southern gothic staple, *The Sound and the Fury*, plays heavily on non-linearity in its structure. I want to question how Faulkner's choice in perspective switching reinforces the themes of his novel. Joyce's debut novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, highlights the usage of free indirect discourse. There is both a mixture of closeness and distance to the main character. I seek to evaluate how this ebb and flow impacts our identification with the protagonist and their development over the course of the novel. Does the least narrative distance give a degree of empathy that overrides other traits of characterization or is there still a "truth" to be seen?

In terms of contemporary work, I will primarily be focusing on short story collections by a single author. Not only will they serve as a contrast to older short stories and novels, they will underscore the differences in technique for different effects in individual stories. I will examine Aimee Bender's *Willful Creatures*, a collection of stories that have a sense of the fantastical to them. How will the usage of narrative distance and point of view impact the transformation of the mundane into the whimsical? Then I will read Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*,

which is centered on the ethnic immigrant experience and reconciling Indian culture with American culture. The focus will be to see how Lahiri explores themes of distance and isolation through her use of narrative distance and perspective. Next, I will analyze Lorrie Moore's *Birds of America*. Her collection has recurrent themes of alienation and the individual versus the group. What roles does narrative distance and point of view serve to support these elements? Moving on, there is Alice Munro's *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*. Central to her stories are issues of distance and communication, and I am curious to see the part narrative technique plays in evoking those themes. Lastly, I wish to investigate Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, a collection of Vietnam war stories centered on the same platoon. It will be fascinating to observe how O'Brien uses narrative distance and perspective in retelling the same scene from different points of the protagonist's life. How does the time difference play a factor in narrative distance?

The two contemporary novels I wish to examine are Julia Alvarez's *Yo!* and Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*. Alvarez's novel follows up her previous work, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, and continues the journey of the Garcia family and finds Yolanda, "Yo," Garcia turning her family and friends lives into part of her novel. I am very interested to survey how Alvarez uses these characters' perspectives to critique Yolanda as author with her own perceived narrative distance and how it impacts and reflects their relationships. Winterson's *Written on the Body* records a love affair between a gender ambiguous narrator and a married woman. I will delve into Winterson's work to see how she can maintain a narrator with no defined gender identity and how it reconciles with the idea of the "fictional dream." How does she balance a complex and close romance with the narrator's distance?

In addition to these fictional texts, I have also included two anthologies of short stories: *Innovations: An Anthology of Modern and Contemporary History* and *The Best American Short Stories 2013*. The *Innovations* anthology fits into my historical context with stories that push the limits of narrative distance and point of view. This will allow me to get a broader sense of technique from the mid-nineteen hundreds. *The Best American Short Stories 2013*, as the name implies, is a modern anthology of fiction with a unifying focus of narrative voice and its corresponding authority. Not only will this let me engage with the writers of today, I can explore how technique has changed and pinpoint the role voice has on narrative. Both anthologies offer unique insights into the history of writing.

To facilitate my research, I plan to meet with my adviser, Professor Karen Boren, once a week to discuss the readings, narrative distance & point of view, and my own writing; moreover, during the semester I will produce a combination of 25-30 pages of creative and analytical writing. Based on the questions outlined in this proposal, my exploration of narrative distance and point of view will expand my creative voice and allow my writing to grow. It is through the completion of this research I will formulate a thesis and create a portfolio of writing that reflects my project's findings.

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Norman Suarez

Professor Boren

English 592

November 5th, 2019

Thesis Proposal

In *Writing Fiction: a Guide to Narrative Craft*, Janet Burroway says, “Point of view is the most complex element of fiction” and that it “concerns the relationship among writer, characters, and reader” (300). Therefore, during the course of my directed reading, my studies focused on point of view and its relationship with narrative distance. I examined how these techniques intersected and influenced other elements of fiction writing—characterization, structure, imagery—through a wide breadth of literature. My intent was to understand how the choices in perspective and distance mold the story and bring a narrative vision to life.

However, James Wood in *How Fiction Works* notes the limitations of point of view: “The house of fiction has many windows, but only two or three doors . . . we are stuck with third- and first-person narration” (Wood 3). Although writers are limited in choosing who is speaking and from what distance, through my explorations I have seen there is no limit to the combinations of point of view and narrative distance. The first-person narrator has the closest distance, placing the reader directly into a character’s consciousness. This unique narrative voice builds an identifiable character and forges an intimate relationship between reader and character. The third-person limited narrator inhabits a single character’s consciousness. This viewpoint character determines whose perspective a story is unfolding from. With distance, a narrator can invite the reader to criticize this character. The third-person omniscient narrator has access to all of the characters’ consciousnesses. They can color the imagery a character sees, giving specific details

that no other character could express. Conversely, a close narrator can ask us to empathize with that character. Depending on how they are paired, point of view and narrative distance are powerful instruments that can achieve a myriad of narrative effects.

For my final thesis project, I plan to submit a collection of fiction tentatively titled *Shutterbug*. My exploration of point of view and narrative distance in the directed reading have led me to recognize their significance in all components of craft—from characterization to structure—and thus incorporate their complex relationship as the guiding principle for my project. My hope is that each story will work towards capturing a different effect created by utilizing a different point of view and level of distance while building cohesive narratives. It is my intention for the collection to adhere to John Garner's assertion, “one may do anything one pleases with point of view, as long as it works” (155).

For example, in her eponymous short story, “Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage,” Alice Munro uses third-person multiple point of view—five character perspectives, but only one at a time—to characterize the protagonist, Johanna, and structure the narrative. Johanna leaves her job behind for a romance with her ward’s widowed father that is unknowingly one-sided and a prank concocted by her young charge’s friend. The reader is able to see Johanna from the other characters’ perspectives, quickly and organically establishing her no-nonsense personality: “She paid for the passenger ticket now . . . Like an old lady. She counted her change, too. But not the way an old lady would count it—she held it in her hand and flicked her eyes over it, but you could tell she didn’t miss a penny. Then she turned away rudely, without a goodbye” (Munro 5). Because of the close distance between the narrator and the viewpoint character, the boundary line separating them disappears, and the reader sees through the character’s eyes, experiencing their description of Johanna. The five character perspectives

also work towards designing the narrative because the consciousnesses we inhabit are limited by their different levels of knowledge of the plot. The reader follows one character's point of view to another as the mystery behind Johanna's manufactured romance is revealed in escalation until the reader is left anxious—due to their close distance and identification with Johanna—over the potential fall out.

In my story attached here, "The Sign," I use a similar approach to Munro's; however, rather than third-person multiple narrators, I utilize three first-person narrators: Joy, Yuna, and Savannah. My objective is to allow the narrative to grow from three different, intimate viewpoints, not only expressing unique voices, but to also have different levels of comprehension structure the narrative. Joy and Yuna are an interracial lesbian couple on the precipice of the former's out of state career advancement and the latter's proposal of marriage; when Savannah, their pet lizard, becomes ill, they must brave a snow storm to save him. In using multiple first-person narrators, I want readers to strongly identify with each character's position and empathize with the character's interpretation of the situation while in their point of view. Each character is limited by what they know and don't know. These gaps in knowledge assist in driving the plot forward in both a micro and macro scale. Each scene focuses on one character's perspective, putting them into conflict with the other characters based largely on the limitations of their knowledge. Furthermore, I am constructing a pattern by the perspective sequence of Joy then Yuna then Savannah. This order underscores how Joy drives the plot forward and is in control of the relationship while Yuna yields to her, and how Savannah, as a lizard, is unable to affect crucial change on his own and needs looking after. This progression will be interrupted. Yuna will seize agency and break the established mold, affording a repetition in scene perspective; Savannah will also maneuver himself between the characters as he is driving a wedge between

them. The narrative's structure will change by the conclusion, paralleling the three characters' points of view.

For a significantly different effect, Callan Wink's "Breatharians" uses third-person limited point of view to highlight contrasting imagery and structure. August, a 13 year old, attempts to rid the family barn of a cat infestation while dealing with the breakdown of his parents' marriage. Both parents live in different houses on the same property. The properties and his parents are framed as opposites from the narrator's viewpoint: "the old house was . . . a single-level ranch, low-slung" built by August's mother's parents while the new house was "tall, with a sharp-peaked roof" and built by August's father (Wink 309). August is alternating between his father/new house and his mother/old house. Instead of voicing his thoughts, August's perspective reveals his interiority through the arrangement of the sections (i.e., collection of scenes separated by white space). Both the parents and parent-sections are separated until one subplot (cats in the barn) moves away from the new house/father section to stand as its own section, to set up August leaving the new house/father to visit the old house/mother in the same section. The reader is able to chart this sequence because August is our point of view character, the only camera whose lens we are able to follow across this spacial and thematic journey.

In my third-person limited work in progress, "Dead End," I aim to encapsulate a similar latitude of spatial movement made possible by point of view. Kimberly Burton-Caldwell is a married, middle aged mother, attempting to resolve her neighbors' noisy car problem and reconcile her wife-mother role with her status as a sexual being. I use free indirect style to blend the gap between the third-person narrator and the sole viewpoint character, Kimberly, so the reader can experience the narrative through her eyes while maintaining a small enough distance to have details filtered through the narrator; there is little authorial flagging (i.e., "She thought").

My objectives are two-fold. First, I plan for readers to become invested and sympathize with Kimberly being rejected by her husband and daughter, yet also question their own interpretation of the narrative because of how close Kimberly and the narrator are. Their two voices have merged, so readers contemplate the subjectivity of the details. Then I expect to craft a structure based on Kimberly's point of view when confronting conflict, so the story is patterned by scenes where she does what someone else wants (remaining in the same setting) or doing what she wants (going to a different setting). The reader follows Kimberley as she moves between locations and experiences the pursuit of her goals from the third-person point of view.

To facilitate the creation of my thesis, I will continue to meet with my adviser, Professor Karen Boren, once a week to receive critical feedback and evaluative commentary on my writing and revisions. Our collaboration will allow my work to progress to the next stage; therefore, I envision submitting my thesis in the spring of 2020. Thus far my directed reading studies have foregrounded the unique relationship that point of view and narrative distance have with the elements of fiction, so it has become my goal to integrate and explore this relationship within my collection. The intention of *Shutterbug* is to exhibit the complex interrelated connection between point of view and narrative, and communicate how a specific narrator and distinct level of distance between a character and a narrator supports not only the development of characterization and theme, but also the framework of a story.

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6. SAMPLE EXAM READING LISTS AND QUESTIONS

Gothic Literature/Feminist Criticism

Primary texts:

Frankenstein - Shelley
"A Rose for Emily" - Faulkner
"Young Goodman Brown" – Hawthorne
"The Lottery" – Jackson
Carmilla – Le Fanu
Beloved - Morrison
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl – Jacobs
Bastard out of Carolina - Allison

Secondary texts:

Specific Literary Criticism:

Patricia D. Hopkins, "Seduction or Rape: Deconstructing the Black Female Body in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*"

Vanessa Dickerson, "The Ghost of a Self: Female Identity in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*"

Angelica Michelis, "'Dirty Mamma': Horror, Vampires, and the Maternal in Late Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fiction" (*Carmilla*)

Phillip Goldstein, "Black Feminism and the Canon: Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* And Morrison's *Beloved* as Gothic Romances"

Peggy Dunn Bailey, "Female Gothic Fiction, Grotesque Realities, and *Bastard Out of Carolina*: Dorothy Allison Revises the Southern Gothic"

General Foundational Theory/Background:

Madwoman in the Attic – Gilbert and Gubar

Playing in the Dark - Morrison

Sister's Choice – Showalter ("American Questions"/"American Female Gothic" chapters)

Ghosts of the Gothic – Wilt

Exam questions:

(1) Your primary texts, which range across about 170 years and come from two national traditions (US, England), fall under the broad category of gothic literature. Several of the critics whose work you read this term attempt further clarification of that category while also offering sometimes conflicting definitions and even terminology (gothic, female gothic, American gothic, and so on). Having done considerable reading in both fiction and feminist theory and criticism,

you certainly have formed your own views on how feminist criticism might help to define and to illuminate the key components of the gothic. Drawing on that criticism, please explain how you define the variant(s) of the gothic that appear on your list of primary texts, including some mention of characteristic themes or concerns. Then use your definition to discuss at least four of the primary texts in some depth and detail. How does considering these works together help a reader to understand them in ways that one might not if one considered them in isolation from each other? Be sure to cite specific critics when drawing on their work.

(2) The earliest work of literature on your list is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which attracted considerable popular interest but very little scholarly attention until the advent of feminist criticism in the 1970s. Since then, many feminist critics have offered readings of that novel, with most addressing in some way Ellen Moers's groundbreaking interpretation of the novel as a birth myth, rooted in the author's own bodily experience of childbirth and its aftermath. As Moers sums up her case, "What Mary Shelley actually did in *Frankenstein* was to transform the standard Romantic matter of incest, infanticide, and patricide into a phantasmagoria of the nursery." Vanessa Dickerson approaches *Frankenstein* from a different (albeit also feminist) perspective, examining the striking absence of women from much of the novel. Shelley's women characters, Dickerson says, inhabit a "shadow realm...a realm wherein the potential or real power of women is not characteristically sustained, recognized, or effective in a world of monster-men, where not only the mothers are typically absent, but the women who are present have only the ghost of a self." The two latest works on your list, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, share Shelley's interest in absent mothers and ghostly female selves (as, arguably, do most of the works on your list); feminist criticism has been enormously important in bringing these works both public interest and scholarly attention. In this essay, bring together two or more important insights from the feminist criticism on your list to discuss what you consider to be central themes of at least four of the literary works on your list. These do not have to be the those mentioned here (birth myth, absent mothers, ghostly female selves).

Masculinity in 20th-Century American Short Stories

Primary Texts:

Nine Stories – Salinger
Cathedral - Carver
Werewolves in their Youth - Chabon
Welcome to the Monkey House – Vonnegut
The Things They Carried – O'Brien
Lost in the City – Jones

Secondary Texts: (see folder)

General Masculinity Studies Overviews:

Chris Beasley, “Mind the Gap? Masculinity Studies and Contemporary Gender/Sexuality Thinking”

Josep Armengol - “Gendering Men: Re-Visions of Violence as a Test of Manhood in American Literature”

Specific Literary Criticism:

Vanessa Hall, “‘It All Fell in on Him’: Masculinities in Raymond Carver’s Short Stories and American Culture during the 1970s and 1980s”

Douglas Fowler, “The Short Fiction of Michael Chabon: Nostalgia in the Very Young”

Tina Chen, “‘Unraveling the Deeper Meaning’: Exile and the Embodied Poetics of Displacement in Tim O’Brien’s ‘The Things They Carried’”

Dominic Smith, “Salinger’s *Nine Stories*: Fifty Years Later”

Donald Morse, “Bringing Chaos to Order. Vonnegut Criticism at Century’s End”

Exam questions:

1. Josep Armengol, in his article “Gendering Men: Re-Visions of Violence as a Test of Manhood in American Literature,” challenges the traditional equation of virility and violence and explores “positive alternatives to traditional masculine ideals and behaviors” (80) in the work of some contemporary American male writers. Do any of the short story writers on your list similarly explore such alternatives, particularly in relation to violence and virility or heroism? If so, analyze and compare these alternative representations. You should focus on at least three of the primary texts on your list, though you could also make passing references to the others. Besides the Armengol article, try to incorporate ideas from at least two of your other secondary sources as well.

2. Vanessa Hall’s article on Carver’s short stories refers to Carver’s “ambivalence towards traditional masculine roles” (175) and argues that his stories “both participate in and critique narratives of wounded white masculinity” (176). Do you find a similar ambivalence among the other short story writers on your list? Are there ways in which the stories both enact and critique “wounded masculinity” (whether white or, in the case of Jones, black)? Analyze and compare the evidence of such ambivalence or participation/critique in the stories, focusing on at least three of your primary texts (though your essay can contain glancing references to the others). You can of course include Carver and Hall’s article, but try to incorporate ideas from at least two of your other secondary sources as well.

Postcolonial Literature: The Diaspora

Primary:

1. *We Need New Names*, NoViolet Bulawayo
2. *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
3. *Ruins*, Achy Obejas
4. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Diaz
5. *The Interpreter of Maladies*, Jhumpa Lahiri
6. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Mohsin Hamid

Secondary:

7. Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press, 1967.
8. Lee, Yoon Sun. "The Postcolonial Novel and Diaspora." *Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 133–152.
9. Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books Edition, 2006.
10. Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. Routledge, 2015.

Exam questions:

Answer one of the following questions. Provide close textual analysis of examples from at least three or four primary sources grounded with your explanation of key ideas from at least two theoretical sources. If possible, include brief references to other readings on your list.

1. Yoon Sun Lee identifies several features of the "diasporic imaginary": "the dialectic of host nation and homeland, the recursive mutual structuring of memory and discovery, the myth of the homeland and the experience of the host nation." Using multiple examples from your primary texts, discuss the interplay of these dialectics. In what ways do characters' navigation of physical and imagined spaces reflect their negotiation of national and cultural identities? How are their efforts toward assimilation or the preservation of cultural tradition complicated by other categories of identity, such as race, class, gender and/or sexuality?
2. According to Ania Loomba, the theoretical complexities of hybridity can be traced to colonial discourse: "One of the most striking contradictions of colonialism is that it needs both to 'civilise' its 'others' and to fix them into perpetual 'otherness.'" Set up an argument grounded in concepts from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and/or Edward Said's *Orientalism* to interrogate notions of hybridity and authenticity in multiple examples from your primary texts.

Postcolonial Literature and Ecocriticism

Primary Sources:

The White Bone – Barbara Gowdy

Animal's People – Indra Sinha

Things Fall Apart – Chinua Achebe

Annihilation – Jeff Vandermeer

Zodiac – Neal Stephenson

The Year of the Flood – Margaret Atwood

Secondary Sources:

Silent Spring – Rachel Carson

Ecocriticism – Greg Garrard

Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor – Rob Nixon

Post-Colonial Ecocriticism – Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin

Exam questions:

1. Rob Nixon begins *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* with an epigraph from Arundhati Roy: “Once you get used to not seeing something, then, slowly, it’s no longer possible to see it.” Set up an argument in which you begin by defining Nixon’s concept of “slow violence” in relation to this epigraph. In what ways does “slow violence” apply to the encroachment of unseen environmental changes or colonial forces in three or four of your primary texts? And, in what ways are “unseen” populations (defined however you choose) at risk in these novels? Draw on your other secondary sources as needed to help flesh out the ecocritical and postcolonial issues at stake.
2. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue that postcolonial ecocriticism is inherently political and “like the diverse literature it explores, [it] slides between ‘advocacy’ and ‘activist’ roles without fully identifying with either of these.” Analyze the slippages between consciousness-raising and the promotion of activism in your selected novels. Be sure to identify specific ecocritical issues at stake. As you develop your argument, acknowledge the nuanced or complex relationships between or among these issues (as you define them).

American Literature and Ecocriticism

Primary texts:

1. *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler
2. *My Year of Meats* by Ruth Ozeki
3. *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmer
4. *Green Grass, Running Water* by Thomas King
5. *Severance* by Ling Ma
6. *Oval* by Elvia Wilk

Secondary/Critical Texts:

7. Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. 2nd ed., 2nd ed., Taylor & Francis, 2011.
8. Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.
9. *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, and Literature*, edited by Douglas A. Vakoch, Lexington Books, 2012. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,
10. ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment
 - a. Gaard, Greta. "New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2010, pp. 643–665.
 - b. Wallis, Andrew H. "Towards a Global Eco-Consciousness in Ruth Ozeki's 'My Year of Meats.'" *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2013, pp. 837–854.
 - c. Schneider, Emma. "Listening to Landscapes: Ecological Healing in the *Birchbark House* and *Mama Day*." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2020, pp. 46–65.
(Included for a section on *Braiding Sweetgrass*)

Exam questions:

Answer one of the following questions. Provide close textual analysis of examples from at least three or four primary sources grounded with your explanation of key ideas from at least two theoretical sources. If possible, include brief references to other readings on your list.

1. In “New Direction for Ecocriticism,” Greta Gaard points out the limitations of the “wave” framework for feminist ecocritics in its erasure of both the history of ecological feminism and feminisms of color. Discuss ways in which three or four of your primary texts open new possibilities for feminist ecocriticism, specifically through the interplay of female bodies, motherhood, and the environment. Consider, for example, concepts of regeneration and hope for the new generation in the midst of ecological crises. In what ways do tensions between looking back to the land for healing and looking ahead toward technology figure into these characters’ stories and/or narrative style?
2. Your primary texts span a broad range of settings: rural and urban, across America and abroad. Drawing on Greg Garrard’s “Dwelling,” discuss the importance of place. How do characters negotiate duty toward an ancestral home versus responsibilities toward the environment on a global scale? In what ways have the combined effects of capitalism, imperialism, and/or globalization altered, threatened, or destroyed communities—of “people lacking resources who are the principle casualties of slow violence” (4) as Rob Nixon explains, and of characters who seem to be thriving in a new setting, yet unaware of “what they are missing” (as you put it) before disaster becomes apparent?